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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RIYADH 001394

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: SAUDI RELATIONS WITH PAKISTAN: AN INDIAN PERSPECTIVE AND PAKISTANI RESPONSE

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Classified By: Classified By: DCM Susan L. Ziadeh for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

SUMMARY:

11. (C) Political officers at the Indian and Pakistani Embassies in Riyadh provided each country's perspective of Saudi goals and relations with Pakistan and Afghanistan. The Indian officer suggested the Saudis remained wary of Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari; noted Pakistan's desire to see the Taliban represented in an Afghan Government; and applauded the recent increase in U.S. troops in Afghanistan. The Pakistani officer suggested that the Saudis were still learning to trust Zardari, and resisted speculation about a preferred Afghan government or the Taliban's future role. End Summary.

Zardari is not Ideal...

12. (C) In an October 11 meeting with a Indian Embassy political officer Amit Mishra, Poloff raised press accounts suggesting that the SAG does not particularly like to deal with Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari. Mishra agreed that Zardari has made several missteps, such as traveling to China as his first official visit before visiting Saudi Arabia, and skipping the opening of the King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) in favor of attending meetings in Europe and the U.S. While the SAG may see these as snubs, Mishra explained, this is Zardari's way of asserting a bit of independence from the SAG. "He's trying to show that he is not relying on them (the SAG), but it's only made them mistrust him."

...but Better than Instability

13. (C) However, Mishra assessed that while the SAG may not necessarily like Zardari's actions, they do not wish to see political infighting lead to instability in Pakistan. Mishra pointed to former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's recent actions as an example. Sharif made statements to the press over the summer about wanting to contest elections in Lahore, but since then has not been heard from. "He's been very quiet lately and he will not contest the Lahore elections, even though his party (the PML-N) wants to." The Indian government thinks this is the result of Saudi intervention, though Mishra did not give any detail as to what he thought the SAG specifically did or said. In another

example of the SAG preferring stability over possible conflict, Mishra said that former Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf will not be tried for treason in Pakistan, and that this is again due to Saudi pressure. "They (the Saudis) don't want to re-open all of the problems with the judges and Musharraf."

A Different View

¶4. (C) Pakistani Political Officer Irfan Shaukat, provided a contrary view of the Saudi-Pakistani relationship. He asserted that the KSA and Pakistan have strong political, economic, security, religious and cultural ties that go beyond most other regional relationships. He cited the recent release of five Pakistanis accused of heroin smuggling into Jeddah as evidence of the special relationship the two countries share. (NOTE: On Sept. 30, the Ministry of the Interior announced the release of five Pakistanis who were arrested on charges of drug smuggling. LEGAT confirms that it is rare for accused drug smugglers, especially foreign nationals, to be released from prison in a country where the crime is often punishable by death. End Note.) Shaukat added that Zardari is new to both politics and the SAG, and that it will take some time before they build a relationship and begin to trust each other. Furthermore, Shaukat explained that any talks that Musharraf had with King Abdullah were between the King and a private citizen. Musharraf did not request support or protocol from the Embassy of Pakistan when he visited the King in Jeddah in September. "Musharraf came to KSA as a citizen, not as the former Prime Minister of Pakistan."

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Who does Pakistan want in Kabul?

¶5. (C) Mishra was quick to point out that the official Government of India policy is that they support a strong national government in Afghanistan, that is led by members of the Northern Alliance. However the Government of Pakistan, in his opinion, will only be comfortable with a coalition government that includes significant representation from the Pashtun region in the south, which would likely include Taliban members. The Pakistanis don't trust Karzai because he lived and trained in India, Mishra continued, and for these reasons the Saudis, attempts to negotiate with the Taliban are a positive step (reftel).

An Elected Leader to Work With

¶6. (C) Shaukat's response to questions about Pakistani views of the GOA leadership was to say that the Government of Pakistan does not support any one group over another and that they will work with the elected leader of Afghanistan. He would not speculate on the role the Taliban might play in a coalition government, only saying that "those who oppose the elected government must lay down their arms if they want to participate."

More U.S. Troops Send the Right Message

¶7. (C) Noting the increased deployment of U.S. soldiers to Afghanistan, Mishra applauded the effort and said that the increase would send a clear message to Afghans. "There are a lot of people sitting on the fence waiting to see who will leave Afghanistan first. People were supporting the Taliban in the past year because they were sure the Americans would leave soon. You need to let them (the Afghans) know that you will not leave."

SMITH